

Frequently Asked Questions

What is a Clinical Breast Exam (CBE)?

A clinical breast exam is when a trained healthcare provider checks your breasts for lumps. The provider will look at and feel your breasts for any changes. The Montana Breast and Cervical Health Program (MBCHP) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends that you have a clinical breast exam every year.

What is a Mammogram?

A mammogram is an x-ray picture of the breast. You will have x-rays taken of one breast at a time. A mammogram can find breast cancer that is too small for you or your health care provider to feel. When you get your mammogram, do not wear deodorant or powder. The MBCHP recommends that you get a mammogram every year if you are 50 years of age or older and every 1-2 years if you are between the ages of 40-49.

What is a Pap Test and Pelvic Exam?

A Pap test is a way to look at a sample of cells taken from a woman's cervix (the opening to the womb). The test is used to look for changes in the cells of the cervix that show cervical cancer or conditions that may develop into cancer. If detected early, cervical cancer can be cured.

The Pap test is done during a pelvic exam. A doctor uses a device called a speculum to widen the opening of the vagina so that the cervix can be examined. A plastic spatula or small brush are used to collect cells from the cervix. The sample is then spread on a slide (conventional) or mixed in a liquid solution (liquid-based) and sent to a lab for examination under a microscope.

The MBCHP recommends and can pay for a Pap test according to the following rules:

Conventional Pap test yearly until you have three normal Pap tests and then every three years.

Liquid-based Pap test is every other year as long as your Pap test is normal.

After the Pap test, the nurse or doctor will do a pelvic exam to check your fallopian tubes, ovaries, and uterus (womb) by putting two gloved fingers inside your vagina. With the other hand, he/she will feel from the outside for any lumps or tenderness. This takes only a few minutes.

Remember, the MBCHP can only pay for a pelvic exam if you also have a Clinical Breast Exam or other services performed at the same appointment.

What is a Breast Biopsy?

The removal of cells or tissues so they can be viewed under a microscope to check for signs of cancer. If a lump in the breast tissue is found, the doctor may need to remove a small piece of the lump. A pathologist views the tissue under a microscope to look for cancer cells.

What is a Colposcopy?

Colposcopy is a way for your doctor to use a special magnifying device to look at your cervix. If a problem is seen during colposcopy, a small sample of tissue may be taken from the cervix. The sample is looked at under a microscope. Colposcopy is usually done to look at the cervix when a Pap test is abnormal.

During colposcopy, your doctor uses a lighted magnifying device that looks like a pair of binoculars (colposcope). The colposcope allows your doctor to see problems that would be missed by the naked eye.

Your doctor may put vinegar (acetic acid) and sometimes iodine (Lugol's solution) on the cervix with a cotton swab or cotton balls to see problem areas more clearly.

What is an Breast Ultrasound?

Breast ultrasound is a procedure that may be used to determine whether a lump is a cyst (sac containing fluid) or a solid mass.

Ultrasound can also be used to precisely locate the position of a known tumor in order to guide the physician during a biopsy or aspiration procedure. Ultrasound helps confirm correct needle placement.

Ultrasound testing works by transmits high-frequency sound waves, inaudible to the human ear, through the breast. The sound waves bounce off surfaces in the breast (tissue, air, fluid) and these "echoes" are recorded and transformed into video or photographic images.